DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 750 HE 033 965

AUTHOR Nesbit, Tom
TITLE Extending Graduate Education to Non-Traditional Learners.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Foreign Countries; *Graduate Students; Graduate Study; Group Membership; Higher Education; *Masters Programs; *Nontraditional Education; Program Descriptions; *Teachers; *Transformative Learning
IDENTIFIERS *Simon Fraser University (Canada)

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the professionally oriented Masters of Education degree program at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia (BC), Canada, a program that provides graduate education to cohorts of nontraditional adult learners using the idea of transformational learning. For the past several years, Simon Fraser University has offered a model M. Ed. Degree program to groups of students based in several BC communities far removed from the home campus. The approach is unique because it is a cohort model, open to nontraditional students who don't always fulfill the normal graduate entrance requirements. The program fosters a transformative leadership emphasis so as to enhance participants' self-perceptions as active learners and leaders of change in the organizations and institutions in which they work. All of the students in the local cohort groups are education professionals with at least 5 years experience as educators. The program itself consists of a 2-year (six semester) series of courses taught (usually on alternate weekends) in students' home areas followed by a comprehensive examination. The middle of each program is a 6-week summer residential session where students from the various cohort groups mix in a variety of courses held at the Simon Fraser home campus. The courses are those one would normally expect in an education graduate program, but the concluding graduate seminar and the form of the comprehensive examination distinguish this program from others. The graduate seminar promoted the idea that a deeper understanding of adult educator's professional development can be based around self-directed learning, critical reflection, and transformational learning. The comprehensive examination, written over 2 weeks at the end of all coursework, is a structured opportunity for students to choose one aspect of their studies and explores it in greater depth and from a variety of perspectives. The approach taken in this program is congruent with educational practices identified as most effective for adult learners by a study by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (1999). (Contains 49 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 452 750

Extending Graduate Education to Non-traditional Learners

Tom Nesbit

Simon Fraser University

T. Nesbit

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Centre for Credit & Integrated Studies
Simon Fraser University
515 West Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC
V6B 5K3
Canada

Phone: (604) 291-4177
Fax: (604) 291-3851
Email: tnesbit@sfu.ca

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HE033965

Extending Graduate Education to Non-traditional Learners

Tom Nesbit
Simon Fraser University

I never thought that a university would ever come here and provide me with the education I wanted when I needed it. (Recent M. Ed. graduate, Terrace, BC).

Contemporary observers have identified significant changes in the provision of higher education in industrialized countries, particularly those whose economies are marked by globalization, international competition, and rapid technological change (Barnett, 1997; Brown et al., 1997; Burgess, 1997; Tierney, 1993). They note how such provision is responding to these social and economic developments while also being modified to accommodate the learning needs and interests of a changing university student population. It seems as if universities are beginning to more fully consider and utilize such concepts as "lifelong learning", "learning society", or "knowledge economy."

One of the most noticeable changes in higher education in the past generation has been the emergence of adult learners as a major constituency. Indeed, the adult and higher education sectors are increasingly concerned with improving access for those formally excluded (Maehl, 2000). However, for lifelong learning to become a true institutional and social reality, all levels of education will require the development of flexible learning systems adapted to the needs and cultures of learners (Singh, 1999). As the demands for access to higher education multiply and the number of adult students enrolling in university programs continues to grow, new forms of organizing education will need to be found that acknowledge, accommodate, and respect non-traditional adult students' concerns and interests. More specifically, universities will have to develop forms of education that focus on the needs of professional practice while also helping adult learners become reflective practitioners (Taylor, 1997).

Several recent research studies variously examine how the goals, purposes, and practices of higher education are changing to meet learners' needs. While some studies explore the impact of

such changes on university governance, funding, resources, and planning (Miller, 1999; Small, 1995) or on the experiences of students (Roberts & Higgins, 1992; Tett, 1999; Woodley et al., 1987), few focus on the effect on teaching and learning or how specific programs might promote pedagogical initiatives or the production and recognition of different types of knowledge. Even those studies that do explore these issues tend to focus either on university students in general (e.g., Lockwood, 1997; McNair, 1998) or more closely on undergraduate education (Ramsden, 1992; Wilson, 1997).

Yet, as undergraduate programs are being forced to adapt to changing circumstances, so too are their graduate counterparts. Universities are under increasing pressure to generate new forms of graduate programs that provide wider opportunities for lifelong learners than at present (Gabor & Yerkes, 1999; Maehl, 2000). Graduate programs can offer comparatively greater flexibility to fit particular social and academic circumstances and, in Canada at least, have evolved into a wide variety of models that provide education more closely tied to students' experiences and needs (Currie & Newsom, 1998; Laiken, 1997). In particular, several graduate programs have developed ways to better accommodate the interests of so-called "non-traditional" adult learners. This paper examines one such model—Simon Fraser University (SFU)'s professionally-oriented M. Ed. degree program—which provides graduate education to cohorts of non-traditional adult learners based on ideas of transformational learning.

Of course, one central purpose of graduate and continuing professional education is to introduce experienced professionals to new knowledge and ideas. Yet, for universities, creating a subject base as much from practical and personal knowledge as from discipline-based knowledge is a relatively new arena. As one seasoned observer notes, higher education norms tend not to favor professional or practical knowledge, and regard them as little more than the daily multiplicity of unreflective judgements (Eraut, 1994). To counter this trend, one crucial aim of the SFU program is to develop critically-reflective educational practitioners whilst also expanding the knowledge base about such practice. Here, the concept of transformative learning is helpful.

The theory of transformative learning is a recent body of work that has made a significant impact on current ideas about how adults learn (Clark, 1993; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 1998). In essence, transformative learning is the cognitive process by which people revise prior interpretations of the meanings of their experience in order to construe new interpretations and to guide future actions. Transformative learning theory is loosely based upon Habermas's (1971) typology of human interest and knowledge and offers significant opportunities for graduate education. Early programs of educator development concentrated on developing teacher's stock of instrumental knowledge—witness the myriad studies on "teacher effectiveness." Now, such a narrow concern is regarded as inadequate for a full understanding of the complexities of educational settings and practices; more recent programs also focus on Habermas's other types of interest and knowledge: the practical and the emancipatory. As Cranton (1996) describes, "our practical interests lead us to want to understand each other and the norms of our society. Our emancipatory interests lead us to critically question perceived constraints and to work towards self-awareness" (p. 141). The potential of transformative learning for graduate and continuing professional education lies in its ability to encourage "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983) which enables experienced professionals to develop their knowledge through reflection on their practice. In other words, they learn to use their experiences as a basis for assessing and revising existing theories of action which then lead to more effective strategies for professional practice. So, transformative learning not only emphasizes that critical examination of ideas about professional practices is key to becoming a skilled practitioner but it also encourages the transformation of those ideas into action.

In the succeeding pages, I examine SFU's program in some detail and then discuss two of its specific features: the use of cohort groups and transformational learning. Finally, I use the results of a recent benchmarking study about adult learners in higher education to highlight certain aspects of this program.

SFU's Program

Several universities in British Columbia—Canada's most westerly province—offer graduate degree programs in education. However, they are all located in the extreme south-west of the province and are generally inaccessible to those who live outside a 75 mile radius from Vancouver. A sizable population of teachers and other educational workers are thus excluded from conventional graduate study. Ironically, the provincial universities were slow to appreciate or react to this situation; instead, certain entrepreneurial American universities entered British Columbia to develop "on-site" programs in educational administration and curriculum specifically for local Canadian students. By the early 1990s, an increasingly embarrassing number of Canadian educators were obtaining graduate degrees from US universities. Simon Fraser University (SFU) began its program largely to stem this "invasion."

For the past several years, SFU has offered a model M. Ed. degree program to groups of students based in several BC communities far removed from the home campus. Among Canadian graduate programs in education, SFU's approach is unique for a combination of reasons: it's based on a cohort model, is open to non-traditional students who don't always fulfill the normal graduate entrance requirements, is offered off-campus, and is designed to be attractive to those who wish to complete a graduate degree while remaining in their own communities. In addition, each program is specifically designed to allow participants the opportunity to explore the philosophical, cultural, and political contexts of their roles as educators while also remaining at work. Most importantly, the program fosters a transformative leadership emphasis so as to enhance participants' self-perceptions as active learners and leaders of change in the organizations and institutions in which they work.

While most of SFU's early cohorts of students came from the K-12 sector, each group contained at least one or two individuals who worked in some form of adult or post-secondary education. Never a group to let their own needs be subjugated to those of their school-based counterparts, these adult educators were also critical of the schooling processes that had failed so many of those they taught. Hence, they became increasingly disenchanted with the avowedly K-

12 orientation of the early programs and began to press for cohort groups to be formed purely from within their own ranks. In 1995, the first of several post-secondary education groups was formed. To date, nine such cohort groups have been developed in British Columbia.

Students

All of the students in these local cohort groups are accomplished education professionals, with a minimum of at least five years experience as educators. Although the majority work as adult basic education or vocational instructors and administrators in community colleges or other formal post-secondary educational institutions, not everyone comes from such conventional settings. For example, recent groups have contained educators from such areas as counseling, social work, medicine and dentistry, workplace literacy, the arts, sports coaching, government training programs, native education, and the environment.

Most students enroll partly for reasons of professional advancement but also for the intellectual stimulation and enrichment that graduate education can offer. Others, however, are concerned that they are "falling behind." Significantly, many post-secondary educators report that their work is subtly changing. The pressure on colleges to deliver more flexibly-organized courses to an ever broadening clientele has bolstered their emphasis on team- and project-work and a need for more flexible work practices. Increasingly, hierarchical systems of decision-making and control are giving way to more horizontal communication between supportive, decentralized, localized, and relatively autonomous units. As a result, colleges are also beginning to rethink and modify their systems of personnel recruitment, promotion, and accountability. Kanter (1989) argues that this is also leading to a shift from position to performance, and from status to contribution where employees are rewarded as much for what they do and contribute as they are for their location in an organisational hierarchy. College teachers and administrators, consequently, are looking to graduate education as a way to better develop the knowledge and skills required in these broader roles that their work demands.

Whatever their reasons for enrolling, students in these programs also report feeling marginal and undervalued in that their work often falls outside both the mainstream activities associated with their profession as well as with more standard educational settings. In addition, because these students come to their educational work more through the perspectives and communities of practice than through conventional educational channels, they often lack formal academic qualifications.

Given that such students do not possess normally accepted qualifications for graduate study, have not followed the customary route from successful completion of schooling into higher education, and tend to be considerably older than the normal entry age (25) for graduate students, they can be labeled as "non-traditional" (Taylor, 1997). SFU's guidelines for the acceptance of such students into its off-campus graduate program require that students fulfill certain criteria deemed equivalent to the possession of a Bachelor's degree. Of course, such criteria include prior academic qualifications but also encompass students' non-academic educational, professional and administrative backgrounds, their experience in curricular and administrative leadership, their ability to document and describe such experiences and their future goals, and other's estimation of their potentials for graduate study and continuing educational leadership.

As non-traditional learners often have little recent experience of formal education, they may lack both confidence in their academic abilities and practice in learning and study skills (Richardson & King, 1998). Yet, ironically, adult students can also have the advantage over their younger counterparts. As Richardson and King suggest, adult students tend to be more motivated by intrinsic than vocational goals, have a significant reserve of prior life experiences which they can use as a basis for learning, tend to develop strong relationships with peers, and are concerned that their education is both more meaningful and relevant to their lives. As such, they tend to evince a deeper approach to learning—one that values wisdom and interpretative, contextualized, and relativistic conceptions of learning rather than one concerned mainly with reproducing course

material for "the exam." Both the comparative strengths and weaknesses of these non-traditional students have served to modify the structure and content of SFU's program.

Program

The program itself consists of a two year (six semester) series of taught courses followed by a comprehensive examination. Students generally take one course each semester—held in their home locality on alternate weekends. The middle of each program consists of a six-week summer residential session where students from the various cohort groups mix in a variety of courses held on the SFU home campus. All courses are what one might normally expect in an education graduate program: introductions to recent educational trends and developments; program planning, implementation, and evaluation; educational philosophies; courses concerning the political and social contexts of education; and dealing with teaching & learning, etc. However, two distinguishing features are the concluding graduate seminar and the form of the comprehensive examination. Each of these is specifically designed to allow students to revisit and review their learning from previous courses, document any subsequent effects on their educational practice, and develop a portfolio of reflective tools to further their professional development.

The graduate seminar—usually the last course that students take—promotes the idea that a deeper understanding of adult educators' professional development can be based around such notions as self-directed learning, critical reflection, and transformative learning. The course provides specific strategies for developing critical thinking and allows students to apply a series of techniques to foster greater autonomy in, and self-management of, their own professional development. The comprehensive exam—written over a two-week period at the completion of all coursework—is a structured opportunity for students to choose one aspect (perhaps a specific topic or a more general theme) from their previous studies and explore it in greater depth and from a variety of dissimilar perspectives. In this way, students come to integrate their own ideas with those of others and learn to appreciate the interconnectedness of several different branches of educational research and study. Of course, these traits may be said to be the objective of most

graduate programs. However, the high percentage of non-traditional students requires that the program addresses these issues more explicitly by including programmatic innovations in its design. What has been found particularly helpful in achieving academic success for such non-traditional students has been the intentional use of cohort groups that, throughout the two-year period, encourage transformational learning.

Cohort Groups

Group learning has long been a feature of most types of adult education, yet its systematic use in more formal academic programs is quite recent. For most higher education institutions, the attraction of cohort groups lies mainly in their simplicity and expedience. As the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning/American Council of Education (1993) report on Adult Degree Programs identifies, cohort groups provide a model that is relatively inexpensive and administratively manageable. Of late, however, more educators are also realizing their potential for enhancing learning (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Basom et al., 1996; Brooks, 1998; Reynolds & Hebert, 1995).

Basically, a cohort is a group of students who begin and complete a program of studies together over a specified period. In general, the cohort group remains intact; although students may take certain additional courses individually (based on personal interest or need), the core of the program is undertaken as a group. In SFU's model, students remain in their cohort group for five of the six semesters, only separating in the summer intensive at the end of the first year. Here, they choose two courses from an array of six and rarely find themselves working with more than three or four others from their cohort group.

Barnett and Muse (1993) suggest that for a cohort group to be successful, certain types of non-traditional methods and organizational strategies should be employed. These include initial development activities, ongoing reflective seminars, preparation for work, and the continued, long-term interactive involvement of students. Of course, one issue arises before the group has ever formed—the selection of potential cohort members. Some universities employ extensive

screening procedures to select students and ensure a diverse group based on gender, ethnicity, learning style, experience, and aspiration. However, in SFU's experience, the emphasis on the "localness" of the group has yielded such richness and diversity in areas of practice that its screening has focused chiefly on experience and aspirations.

Studies indicate that cohorts work best if they can themselves engender a supportive learning environment without too much help from "outside." Indeed, Brooks argues that cohort groups "require little or no need for activities which try to foster initial group cohesion" (1998, p. 67). However, SFU has found it beneficial for each group to develop an early sense of cohesion among cohort members if only for encouraging students' commitment to creating a learning climate based upon trust, openness and mutual respect. Because such an environment cannot be assumed to occur naturally, the initial coursework is designed to engender an environment where students feel able to challenge each other (and the instructors) and share their tentative and developing understandings. As Carol, a student in a current cohort describes,

> Cohorts are created not born. They are successful when everyone works collaboratively and collectively on improving their own and others' learning experiences. It takes self-responsibility, patience, courage, humor, commitment, sensitivity, and a lot of hard work to create such an enriching learning for everybody.

Essential to this process is the provision of adequate time for reflection and meta-learning. Initial courses generally require students to collectively produce and share materials and resources and keep "learning journals" where they can reflect on the course readings and activities as well as gain some insight into their own emotional and cognitive rhythms as learners. These activities can help create a sense of student ownership of, and responsibility for, learning as students work together to shape the content of the program. A common view in adult education—if not yet widely accepted in many universities—is that adult learners and their teachers can be partners in the common enterprise of making meaning. As Peter, a recent graduate put it,

> I thought we'd spend all our time listening to lectures. In fact we've done most of the talking. Most of the teachers didn't tell us what to think but helped us think for

ourselves. And, although I've learned a lot from them, I feel I've learned just as much from my fellow students. Our greatest asset has been each other.

His cohort colleague, Brenda, also spoke about this aspect of collaborative learning:

The dynamics of working in such a group are so different from working on your own—you get other perspectives, have to defend your own, sometimes you change what you think. The end result is way more than just the sum of the parts.

Another core emphasis is assisting students with their continuing professional development. Based on the notion that change is a process rather than an event, such development is regarded as ongoing and continuous and linked inexorably with educator's daily practices. Consequently, SFU's program builds professional development activities into every course; further, it challenges students to engage intellectually with the assumptions and values that lie behind their practices on a daily and ongoing basis.

The professional development of educators is not only a matter of personal choice but is also affected by organizational, social, and cultural factors. SFU's program tries to enable its students to first identify the barriers and constraints to implementing change in their institutions and organizations and, second, to strategize how these might be overcome by educators acting together. Of course, this cannot be just contained within the program's two-year span. Throughout, carefully fostered activities such as use of peer-editing and email discussion groups and study circles are designed to help students (and graduates)—many of whom work in isolation—keep in touch with one another long after their program has ended. As Hargreaves (1994) identifies, students need not be just technical learners but social learners too. This concern with staying in touch to further the promotion of change underpins the second feature of SFU's program: that of transformational learning.

Transformational Learning

The SFU program purposely seeks to promote the notion of learning as transformation. Its impulse lies towards encouraging students to develop their own understandings of themselves

as learners as they move from passive recipients to active creators of knowledge. Theories of adult learning suggest that this process is enhanced by the inclusion of specific opportunities for reflection and practice (Baxter Magolda, 1996). Further, as Gibbs (1981) identifies, the skills required to be an effective learner are best acquired in the context of students' everyday academic activities. Hence, by the end of their program, students should feel confident and able to assume the authority to shape their own concluding examination questions to suit their own areas of interest and expertise.

Such transformation does not occur in the abstract. Because the central process of transformative learning is critical reflection, SFU's program encourages students to examine the philosophical, cultural, and political contexts of their work and develop and extend what philosopher Charles Taylor (1985) calls their "constituent self-understandings." It does this by initially asking students to develop a personal "theory of practice"—a broad view of their own practice as an educator and the set of philosophical assumptions, beliefs, and values that lie behind it. Of course, theories of practice are context-bound and students are also encouraged to reflect upon, and theorize about, the social contexts of their work as well as the content of such work. In other words, when detailing their educational practices, students are not only expected to formulate explicitly what it is they do and describe the activities central to it, but also to articulate and examine the norms which are essential to it, identify any inherent contradictions, and explore possible alternatives.

In this way, SFU's program aims for what Keith Jackson calls the "adult education of engagement":

> The view that adults bring something which derives both from their experience of adult life and from their status as citizens to the educational process; that adult education is built on a dialogue rather than a mere transmission of knowledge and skill; that education is not only for personal development but also for social advancement; that adult education constructs knowledge and does not merely pass it on; that adult education has a dialectic and organic relationship with social movements. (1995, p. 184).

Of course, this is not always a simple task. Most students bring an essentially practical orientation to understanding their work and initially resist developing more abstract or theoretical meanings, particularly those that question or challenge dominant educational discourses and practices. To counter this, the program tries to introduce the view, first, that a fuller explanation of the social practices that mark educational situations and activities requires certain self-descriptions on the part of participants. Furthermore, students are encouraged to consider that these descriptions are neither as individual nor as unique as might be at first supposed but can be seen as part of a interrelated set of commonly-held concepts, beliefs, assumptions, values, and interpretations. Joanne, a college department head, provides a good example:

> We had this reading on dealing with the political realities of teaching. When I first read it I thought it was common sense if a bit overly cynical—you know keep your head down, build alliances, choose your battles etc. Then, in class, each of us had to describe an incident where we'd had to exercise some aspect of political survival at work. I was amazed at what the others said. I thought I was the only one who had ever experienced ignorance and bigotry from my superiors. It seems as if everyone had a similar story to tell. Now I see that it's in some way built in to the system...it's as if I'm treated like this so I'll then pass it on to the students. That's not what education should be about.

As Joanne's comment shows, making individual interpretations and assumptions public can show that they have a collective character and might form part of a received hegemonic system that privileges certain understandings and downplays others. Further, such dominant understandings are played out (and, hence, can be seen) in everyday practices and situations in what Roger Simon (1992) calls a "social grammar" of education. In short, students learn that a full appreciation and explanation of educational phenomena requires that students make both explicit and problematic the contexts in which their work is embedded.

This process is aided by the strong characteristic of adult learners to want to make sense of their experiences. In the cohort groups, the diversity in student backgrounds provides a rich resource of experiences upon which to reflect. In addition, the program encourages learners to

develop a common concern for exploring the opportunities for learning inherent in those experiences. A telling example is provided by George, another recent graduate:

> I was exposed to many different ideas and perspectives and ways of thinking and learning. For example, one student's emotional responses (particularly her anger) forced me to ask why I am not nearly as emotional about learning. In one class, she said she was so angered by what she had read that she wanted to throw the book against the wall. In reflecting on my response to the same material, although I disagreed with what had been written I certainly didn't feel like throwing the book or even slamming it down on the table. I realized that I am more measured in my response....The point is that I shouldn't become more like her but rather her responses prompted me to ask questions about my own emotional responses to learning which made me more aware of how I learn.

Discussion

For many years, adult education research has shown that adults learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning experience and that the curriculum they study is most effective when it builds upon their life experiences and interests (Brookfield, 1986; Cross, 1981; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Despite this, dominant approaches towards adult learning in higher education often seem like a holdover from the time when traditional students predominated on campus. Indeed, according to a recent report, "many current higher education practices are ill adapted to the needs of...adult learners. They pose barriers to participation which include a lack of flexibility in calendar and scheduling, academic content, modes of instruction and availability of learning services, among others" (Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners, 1997, p. 3).

To address this, a recent study by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (1999) sought to identify exactly what existing institutional practices were most effective for adult learners in North American colleges and universities. The study found one overarching theme and several key aspects, organized around the operational and structural elements of an "adult learning focused institution of higher education" (p. 6). Although the study concentrated on

higher education institutions as a whole, many of its conclusions can also apply to individual programs. Hence, by considering the key findings of this study, we can examine how innovations in program design might play out in pedagogical initiatives.

The overarching theme of the study's findings refers to the creation of an environment of institutional practice that is driven by adult-centered learning and a sensitivity to learners' needs. This can certainly be seen in recent graduate education programs. Being deliberately designed to be inclusive, supportive, and respectful of student difference and personal preference, their whole ethos and approach places adult learners more towards the center of the educational experience. Whether by modifying program and course requirements, maintaining flexible administrative structures and instructional modes, or by choosing delivery times and places that are convenient for learners' needs, such programs can ensure that learners' overall educational experience responds as much as possible to their goals and interests. Focussing on how SFU's program exemplifies several of the key findings of the study can illustrate just how this might be done.

The first finding refers to admission procedures being used to provide the best educational match for prospective adult students. The goal here is to provide a process that is as inclusive as possible for adults with diverse backgrounds and abilities. This approach underscores SFU's concern to offer graduate study to those for whom it is not normally available—whether for geographical, experiential, or academic reasons. By locating programs in communities often far away from the home campus and by recruiting non-traditional students into specific cohort programs, SFU's approach focuses more on the needs and interests of adult students rather than solely on those of the institution. In addition, SFU's admissions policy operates on the principle of inclusivity rather than on one of exclusivity. All who apply are carefully considered by a team of faculty and administrators, not only to determine if their own unique abilities, skills, and prior experiences would be academically appropriate for graduate study, but also to assess a prospective student's readiness and motivation to learn and how much they might meaningfully learn in, and contribute to, a specific cohort of learners.

A second finding concerns involving adult learners in the design of their programs of study so that they can make increasingly informed decisions about their own learning. Recognizing that such students are already accomplished educators but also experienced learners, SFU's program attempts to build personal and professional development activities into all its pedagogic practices. As Cranton (1996) indicates, "educators' growth and development [is] a process of becoming more autonomous and independent, of engaging in critical reflection, and of revising perspectives on practice" (p. 1). To do this, SFU's adult learners are regularly encouraged to engage in a collaborative process of talking about their experiences, becoming aware of their assumptions and expectations, and learning to question and examine these assumptions. Through this, they acquire the skills of persistent critical examination of themselves, their institutions, and of the daily practices that inform each. In this way learners develop what others (Mills, 1967; Negt, 1963) have called a "sociological imagination"—the ability to see the connection between the immediate and individual experience on the one hand and societal and complex structures on the other.

A third and final consideration relates specifically to the process of teaching/learning which should actively involve learners in collaborative learning experiences centered around their lives and work and help them meet their own learning goals. In SFU's program, the teaching/learning process is designed to be personalized, active, collaborative, experiential, and built upon the theories, philosophies, and best practices of adult learning. It assumes that adult learners themselves can create knowledge and, as activists and intellectuals, are eager to connect their new understandings with the skills and knowledge necessary to change their work. Hence, students are constantly encouraged to relate readings and in-class activities to their own and fellow cohort members' common working situations and practices. In addition, by focusing on experiential or work-related topics, students become motivated to select assignments and projects that enhance their academic skills and conceptual understanding whilst also developing their sociological imagination. Embedding this pedagogical approach firmly in every educational

activity serves as a recognition that as work is the sphere in which the experience of problems is most acute then it also becomes the social location for collective professional and personal action.

Conclusion

At the beginning of a new millennium, universities are clearly facing major challenges. As Thompson and Lamble (2000) note, universities must maintain and improve the excellence of teaching and research in a climate of increased financial restraint and emphasis on cost recovery and an increased public demand for accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency. However, at the same time, universities are also being expected to increase access to academic programs and learning opportunities and respond to changing societal needs and expectations about their roles and functions within society.

How universities respond to the challenges and opportunities brought about by globalization and technological change can be related to the extent that they practically espouse concepts such as lifelong learning. For many in higher education, the primary purpose of universities will continue to be the preparation of young people for citizenship and the world of work. Notions of lifelong learning may appear in the rhetoric of mission statements and policy documents, but the conventional systems of admission, selection, teaching, and assessment can easily remain relatively unchanged. Other institutions recognize that also providing more mature professionals with higher degrees can help them contribute immediately to social and economic well-being. These latter institutions, while still keeping the creation, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge as their core purpose, will likely increasingly incorporate lifelong learning into their provision. Curricula, pedagogy, residency and attendance requirements, and the structure and systems of delivery will be altered to respect the very different approach of organizing education around adult and professional learners rather than simply around a discipline.

This is far from easy. As Fryer (1997) and Jones (1999) have indicated, universities aren't too good at dealing with anything informal and tend to marginalize educational activities that fall

outside of their own conventional and traditional systems of delivery. Whatever the approach, the presence of increasing numbers of non-traditional learners in higher education presents a challenge to conventional university teacher-centered pedagogies. Adult and professional students are much less inclined to conform to the restrictions that shape traditional approaches to university education. Also, experienced professionals with advanced degrees are going to be much more persistent in holding institutions accountable for the education on offer. As universities accept more and more non-traditional adult students, they are going to have to be more respectful of what such students want, need, and expect.

References

Barnett, B. G., & Muse, I. D. (1993). Cohort groups in educational administration: Promises and Challenges. Journal of School Leadership, 3, 400-415.

Barnett, R. (1997). Higher education: A critical business. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Basom, M., Yerkes, D., Norris, C., & Barnett, B. (1996). Using cohorts as a means for developing transformational leaders. Journal of School Leadership, 6 (1), 99-112.

Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1996). Epistemological development in graduate and professional education. Review of Higher Education, 19 (3), 283-304.

Brookfield, S. D. (1986). Understanding and facilitating adult learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brooks, P. A. (1998). Cohort communities in higher education. In Proceedings of the 39th Adult Education Research Conference. San Antonio, TX, pp. 67-71.

Brown, P., Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., & Wells, A. S. (1997). The transformation of education and society: An introduction. In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown, & A. S. Wells (Eds.), Education, Culture, Economy, & Society, pp. 1-44. New York: Oxford University Press.

Burgess, R. G. (1997). Beyond the first degree: Graduate education, lifelong learning, and careers. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Clark, M. C. (1997). Transformational learning. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), An update on adult learning theory. (pp. 47-56). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 57.

Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners. (1997). A nation learning: Vision for the 21st Century. Albany, NY: Regents College.

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. (1999). Serving adult learners in higher education. Chicago: Author.

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning/American Council of Education. (1993). Adult degree programs. Chicago: Author.

Cranton, P. (1996). Professional development as transformative learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cross, K. P. (1981). Adults as learners. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Currie, J., & Newsom, J. (Eds.). (1998). Universities and globalization: Critical perspectives. London: Sage Publications.

Eraut, M. (1994). Developing professional knowledge and competence. London: Falmer Press.

Fryer, R. H. (1997). Learning for the Twenty-first century. London: National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning.

Gabor, S. C., & Yerkes, A. M. (1999). The university's changing role in post-baccalaureate education. Continuing Higher Education Review, 63, 56-67.

Gibbs, G. (1981). Teaching students to learn. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Habermas, J. (1971). Knowledge and human interests. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Hargreaves, A. (1994). Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age. London: Cassell.

Jackson, K. (1995). Popular education and the state: A new look at the community debate. In M. Mayo & J. Thompson (Eds.), Adult learning, critical intelligence, and social change, pp. 182-203. London: NIACE.

Jones, G. A. (1999). Islands and bridges: Lifelong learning and complex systems of higher education. Paper presented at the International Symposium on Non-traditional learners in Higher Education. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, August 16-17.

Kanter, R. (1989). When giants learn to dance. London: Simon & Schuster.

Laiken, M. (1997). Experiential graduate education: An experiment in transformative learning. Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education, 23 (1), 61-80.

Lockwood, F. (1997). Future developments in teaching and learning within higher education. Staff and Educational Development International, 1 (1), 19-28.

Maehl, W. H. (2000). Lifelong learning at its best. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McNair, S. (1998). The invisible majority: Adult learners in English higher education. Higher Education Quarterly, 52 (2), 162-198.

Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R. S. (1999). Learning in adulthood (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1991). Transformative dimensions of adult learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, R. I. (1999). Major American higher education issues and challenges in the 21st century. London: J. Kingsley Publishers.

Mills, C. Wright. (1967). The sociological imagination. New York: Oxford University Press.

Negt, O. (1963). Soziologische phantasie und exemplarisches lernen. [Sociological imagination and exemplary learning.] Frankfurt: Europäische Velagsanstalt.

Ramsden, P. (1992). Learning to teach in higher education. New York: Routledge.

Reynolds, K. C., & Hebert, F. T. (1995). Cohort formats and intensive schedules: Added involvement and interaction for continuing higher education. Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 43 (3), 34-41.

Richardson, J. T. E., & King, E. (1998). Adult students in higher education. Journal of Higher Education, 69 (1), 65-88.

Roberts, D., & Higgins, T. (1992). Higher education: The student experience. Leeds, UK: Heist/PCAS.

Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. New York: Basic Books.

Simon, R. I. (1992). Teaching against the grain. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Singh, M. (Ed.). (1999). Adult learning and the future of work. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education.

Small, J. M. (1995). Reform in higher education in Canada. Higher Education Quarterly, 49 (2), 113-127.

Taylor, C. (1985). Philosophy and the human sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, E. W. (1998). The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.

Taylor, I. (1997). Developing learning in professional education. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.

Tett, L. (1999). Widening provision in higher education—some non-traditional participants' experiences. Research Papers in Education, 14 (1), 107-119.

Thompson, G., & Lamble, W. (2000). Reconceptualizing university extension and public service. Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education, 26 (1), 51-77.

Tierney, W. G. (1993). Building communities of difference: Higher education in the Twenty-first century. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Wilson, F. (1997). The construction of paradox? One case of mature students in higher education. Higher Education Quarterly, 51 (4), 347-366.

Woodley, A., Wagner, L., Slowey, M., Hamilton, M., & Fulton, O. (1987). Choosing to learn: Adults in higher education. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.